

WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Steny Hoyer released the following statement today in recognition of Memorial Day and to make note of a series of votes he supported last week that would have increased medical funding for veterans and members of the National Guard and Reserve. Congressman Hoyer will observe Memorial Day in Ridge in St. Mary's County, Maryland and will give the keynote address at American Legion Post 255 during the Memorial Day ceremony.

"This Memorial Day ought to be a day for all Americans to recommit themselves to fulfilling our nation's legacy of appreciation and commitment to the men and women who have donned the uniform of the U.S. Armed Forces in defense of liberty. When our servicemen and women return home, it is our nation's obligation to ensure that they are supported, but as our population of veterans grows, we face ever-growing challenges that must be addressed.

"The number of veterans treated at VA facilities increased from 2.7 million to 4.7 million from 1995 to 2004. More than 50,000 veterans are waiting at least 6 months to receive health care at a VA hospital. Medical costs are increasing at nearly double the rate of inflation. And, the VA is expecting a net increase of 300,000 veterans in the system for Fiscal Year 2006.

"In the week preceding Memorial Day, Democrats introduced five amendments that I supported to end the unfair benefits cuts on our troops, their families, veterans and military retirees, and increase health care funding for veterans and members of the National Guard and Reserve.

"These amendments would have ended the Disabled Veterans Tax and the Military Families Tax for all military families who lost loved ones in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. They would have provided veterans with an additional \$2.6 billion for VA health care and full TRICARE to all members of the Guard and Reserve and their families.

"And, on the day before Members of Congress returned to their districts to commemorate Memorial Day, Rep. Charlie Melancon (D-LA) offered an amendment to provide an additional \$53 million in urgently needed funding for veterans health care including combat-related trauma care, prosthetics, assistance for war orphans, and to process claims for compensation and pensions – funding specifically targeted to help veterans returning from the war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“However, Republicans in the House of Representatives voted five times against these Democratic Amendments that would have invested in such badly needed care and services and by an overwhelming majority opposed each of these amendments.

“Republicans argue that they increased funding for Veterans Medical Services by \$1.7 billion above the President’s inadequate budget request, but they rob Peter to pay Paul – these funds are taken from VA hospital operating costs, VA health care administration costs and VA medical research. Over 5 years, the Republican budget for veterans programs, primarily health care, is \$13.5 billion below the amount to maintain services at current levels.

“We must honor our veterans when they return home by fulfilling the promise we made to them when they departed. As we collectively remember and honor those who have given their lives defending America’s freedom and the many millions of veterans still among us, we can memorialize the magnitude of their deeds and sacrifices by taking action to, as President Clinton said, be the stewards of their sacrifice.”

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